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Colette

Andrew James Petersell
Bard College, ap8382@bard.edu

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Bard

“Colette”

An Interactive Fiction

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Language and Literature
of Bard College

by
Andrew Petersell

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 201

This project is dedicated to the members of the Valley Experience, the cast of Regularly Scheduled Programming, and to anyone else who ever told me that games can be art.

And also to Bayan Shaku, because I said I would.

Colette

An Interactive Fiction by Andrew Petersell

Colette is a work of interactive fiction that questions the role of the reader, and explores the unique ways in which agency, interpersonal relationships, and environmental conditioning can define a person's identity. The reader is placed in the mind of the titular Colette as she tries to piece together the life she had before a tragic accident robbed her of her memory. The piece purposefully blurs the line between audience and character by giving the reader almost full control over Colette's actions. By typing simple text commands into the interface, the reader can choose where Colette goes, what she explores, whom she interacts with, and what decisions she makes throughout her journey. The world and narrative of the story change depending on how the reader chooses to interact with the text, making each reader's experience with the piece truly unique.

Colette was created using Inform 7, a program created by Graham Nelson, Emily Short, and Andrew Hunter that converts natural language into code to create text-based interactive stories. For someone like myself, who is deeply fascinated by interactive stories but has little technical experience in creating them, Inform 7 provides the ideal platform by which to explore the medium.

Colette is a computer-based interactive work reminiscent of text-based adventure games like *Zork* and *Colossal Cave Adventure*. Instead of reading the story linearly, the reader is presented with a number of options, and can navigate the text however he or

she chooses by typing text commands into the interface. The narrative unfolds as the reader explores the world of the text, and certain aspects of the story will change depending on the decisions that the reader makes. The interface of the system is fairly intuitive, but for the sake of clarity, I've included a short tutorial on how to navigate the text.

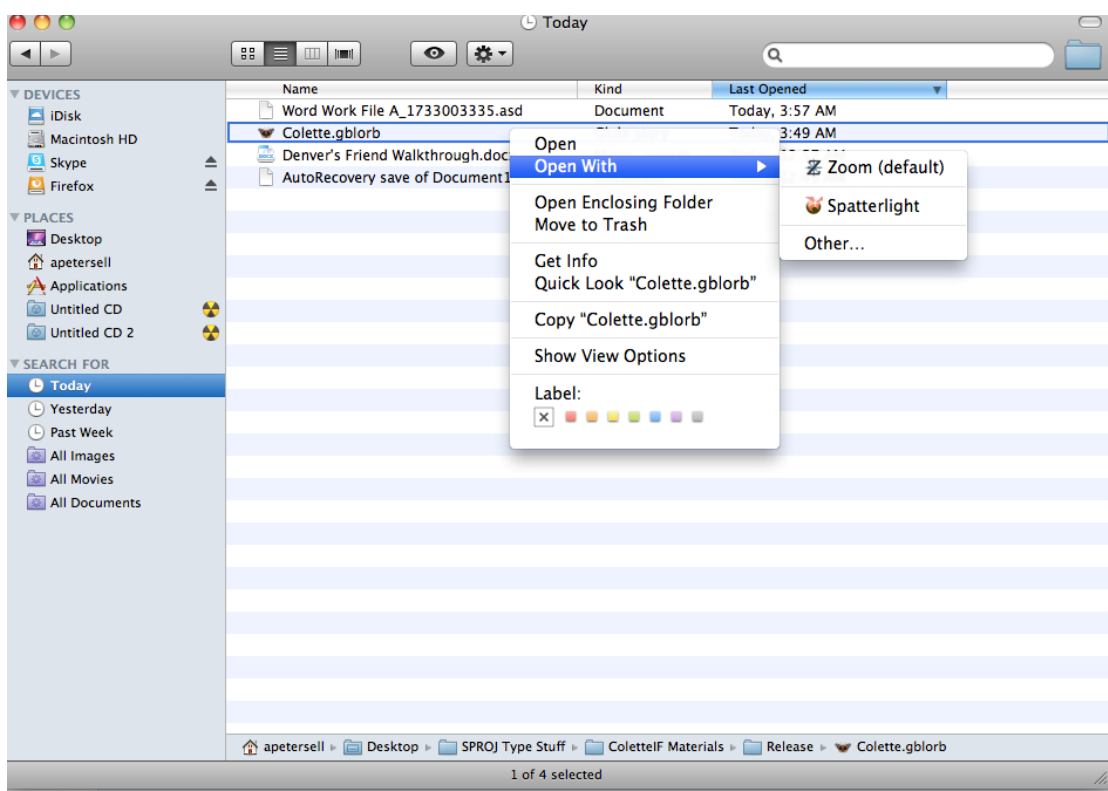
With *Colette*, I intend to explore and question the unique space between self and other that a person inhabits while he or she is assuming the role of someone else. The work explores the joy of self-expression, the exhilaration of role-play, the crisis of self-dissociation, and consequences of assuming a false identity. This is not only true of the character in the narrative, but of the reader as well. Just as Colette must decide between being the person she feels she is, and being the person that she was before her amnesia, the reader must decide if he or she will assume the role of Colette, or merely use her as a conduit for his or her own self expression. As Colette discovers, and ultimately questions her identity throughout the narrative, it is my hope that the reader will simultaneously begin to question the role that his or her participation plays in the narrative as well.

How to Read *Colette*

Getting Started:

In order to read the story file for *Colette* (Colette.gblorb), you will first need to download an IF Interpreter. There are a number of Interpreters available for free on the Inform 7 website. (<http://inform7.com/if/interpreters/>) Before you download an Interpreter, make sure that it is compatible with your operating system, and that it is capable of running .gblorb files. Information about each Interpreter can be found on the Inform website.

Once you download the Interpreter, right-click Colette.gblorb and open it with your Interpreter. A window should open up with the story file ready to start.



Note that once you open the story file, you cannot close it until you've finished reading the story. Unfortunately, there's no way to bookmark your progress between sessions, so if you close the file, you'll have to start the story again from the beginning when you

open it back up. For the best experience of narrative, it is best to keep the window open until you finish reading the story.

Using Commands:

In order to navigate the text of *Colette*, the reader must use a series of simple commands to tell the system what he or she would like to do. For example, if the reader want to listen to his or her surroundings, all he or she need to do is type “**listen**” into the text field and press “enter” on his or her keyboard. The story will recognize the command and produce an appropriate response.

>listen

You hear the steady flow of the kitchen sink as Clare washes up the dishes from breakfast. You can also hear the pounding of music coming through the wall.

There’s no limit to what the reader can type into the text field, but keep in mind that not all commands will produce results.

>do a backflip

That’s not a verb I recognise.

What can and cannot be used as a command is fairly intuitive, but sometimes it can be difficult to figure out the exact wording of a certain action. For example, let’s say that the reader wants to leave a room. There are many different ways he or she could phrase such an action, but not all of them will work as commands.

>leave the room

I only understood you as far as wanting to leave.

>go out

You can’t go that way.

>step through the door

That’s not a verb I recognise.

>

If the reader is struggling to find a command that works, he or she should try searching through the body of the text. Words and phrases that are in **bold** can often be used as commands, and usually provide the exact wording for actions that can be phrased in

many possible ways. Citing the example above, the phrase “**go through the door**” has been bolded within the text of the story.

Suddenly, you hear a muffled voice calling from outside the room.

"Breakfast!"

It sounds like Clare. Maybe you should **go through the door** and see if you can find her.

This is recognized as a command, and typing it into the text field will allow the reader to leave the room.

Note that not all bolded phrases in the text can be used as commands, nor are they the *only* commands that the reader can use. There are a number of viable commands that are not spelled out in the text that will still produce results. The reader is encouraged to experiment with a number of different commands and see what her or she can find.

Interacting with the Environment:

Much of the narrative in *Colette* is uncovered by interacting with objects in the environment. To do this, the reader will need to use commands that specify which object in the room he or she would like to interact with, and what he or she would like to do with it.

For example, the text tells the reader that there is a piano in living room, and he or she would like to look at it more closely. To do so, the reader must use the “**examine**” command, but he or she must also designate the piano as the thing that he or she wants to examine. Typing, “**examine piano**” into the text field will produce the desired result.

>**examine piano**

Pressed up against the eastern wall of the living room is an old upright piano. It's covered with stacks of outdated magazines and unopened mail; it probably hasn't been seriously played in years.

>|

When designating an object, the story may be able to recognize an object by its synonyms. For example, the reader is told that there is a sofa in the living room. Using the command “**examine sofa**” will obviously allow him or her to look at it more closely, but typing, “**examine couch**” will produce the same result.

>examine sofa

The long horseshoe shaped sofa is pushed up against the north wall directly underneath the large **bay window**. It looks old. The white cushions have long since faded to grey and they've sunken in, giving them a melancholy, deflated look.

>examine couch

The long horseshoe shaped sofa is pushed up against the north wall directly underneath the large **bay window**. It looks old. The white cushions have long since faded to grey and they've sunken in, giving them a melancholy, deflated look.

However, not all objects will be recognized by their synonyms, so it's often best to refer to an object by its printed name.

Many objects can be interacted with in more than one way, and will produce different bits of text depending on how the reader interacts with them. For example, trying to play the piano will produce a different result than trying to examine it.

>play piano

You tap a few random keys producing some satisfying plinks. You think about how the doctors at the hospital always told you to try remembering things by doing them. Maybe you could play the piano if you tried. It's worth a shot, but right now you're more concerned with finding Zoe. Maybe you can give it a more serious go later.

>

Like other commands, the ways in which the reader can interact with objects are often spelled out directly in the text. However, the reader is encouraged to experiment with any commands that he or she may think of.

Navigating the World:

The world of *Colette* is divided into rooms. When the reader enters a room, he or she will be given a brief description of the setting and a list of visible objects in the room. Entering the command "**look**" at any time will allow the reader to view this information again.

Your Bedroom

Your room is mostly bluish. The walls are painted in a soft blue, your bed is done up in blue, even the floor is covered in a blue carpet. Blue must be your favorite color, although you've always been partial to green.

You can see your bedroom door, a desk (on which are a framed picture, a laptop, a desk lamp and an alarm clock), a bookshelf, a butterfly chair, a bed and a closet (closed) here.

Not every object in a room is necessarily listed in the room description. There could be objects hiding out of sight in drawers and containers, and they only become visible once the reader finds them. Other objects, known as “scenery,” never appear in the room description, but can still be interacted with. These are often things that are part of the room itself, such as walls and floors.

The reader can move between rooms either by going through doors, or by typing compass directions into the text fields. For example, here is the description of the hallway:

Hallway

The hallway is narrow; barely wide enough for one person to walk comfortably. There are a number of faint black fingerprints dotting the off-white walls along with some longer scuff marks lower down near the hardwood floors.

The hallway filters out into the living room to the **west**. You can also **go through** any of the doors here to get to the other rooms of the house.

You can see a bathroom door, a master bedroom door, Zoe's door and your bedroom door here.

As the room description notes, the living room is to west. Simply typing “**west**” into the text field will bring the reader from the hallway to the living room.

Hallway

The hallway is narrow; barely wide enough for one person to walk comfortably. There are a number of faint black fingerprints dotting the off-white walls along with some longer scuff marks lower down near the hardwood floors.

The hallway filters out into the living room to the **west**. You can also **go through** any of the doors here to get to the other rooms of the house.

You can see a bathroom door, a master bedroom door, Zoe's door and your bedroom door here.

As you step out into the hallway, you are overpowered by the warm smell of pancakes and the thought of breakfast suddenly seems very appealing to you. The smell is coming from the **west** end of the hallway. That must be where Clare is calling you from.

>west

Living Room

The west end of the hallway filters out into the living area. The basic arrangement is pretty standard; a sofa and a pair of armchairs facing towards a television set. It's not totally unlike the arrangement found in the common area of the hospital.

The reader can also go through any of the doors in the hallway to get to the other rooms in the house. For example, typing, “**go through the bathroom door**” will bring the player from the hallway into the bathroom.

Hallway

The hallway is narrow; barely wide enough for one person to walk comfortably. There are a number of faint black fingerprints dotting the off-white walls along with some longer scuff marks lower down near the hardwood floors.

The hallway filters out into the living room to the **west**. You can also **go through** any of the doors here to get to the other rooms of the house.

You can see a bathroom door, a master bedroom door, Zoe's door and your bedroom door here.

>go through the bathroom door

(first opening the bathroom door)

Bathroom

The bathroom has a strange, but not wholly unpleasant smell to it; like cleaning chemicals mixed with peaches. The tiled floor beneath your feet is barely visible underneath the shaggy throw rugs and and discarded towels.

The ways in and out of a room are often listed in the room description. In most cases, typing, “**go through door**” into the text field will bring the player out of the room that they are currently in.

Dialogue and Decisions:

There are many points throughout the story when Colette will engage in conversations with other characters. During these sequences, all the reader needs to do is simply press any key on his or her keyboard to cycle through each line of dialogue.

During certain conversations, characters may ask Colette questions, and it is up to the reader to select an answer.

"Do you know what your middle name is?"

(answer **yes** or **no**)|

During these moments, the only viable commands are “**yes**” and “**no**,” and the reader must select one or the other in order to progress in the story. Typing anything else into the text field will simply prompt the reader to make the decision again.

"Do you know what your middle name is?"

(answer **yes** or **no**) **Maybe**
Please answer yes or no.> |

The reader should consider his or her decisions carefully during these moments, as they often play a large part in deciding the outcome of the story.

You're Ready to Start!

This tutorial is meant to supply the reader with the tools he or she will need to navigate the text, but it is entirely up to him or her to decide how to use them. *Colette* is a dynamic story that changes depending on how the reader chooses to interact with it, and as such there is no “right” or “wrong” way to read it. Each person’s experience of the text will be different. So choose your course of action wisely, and have fun reading *Colette*!